

Rocky Mountain

National Park
Estes Park, Colorado
80517



VOLUNTEERS IN PARKS (VIP)



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) has more than three million visitors each year. This large number of visitors, in a park only a quarter million acres in size, presents a challenge: a lot of work and not enough park staff to do it!

RMNP’s VIP program is one of the largest volunteer programs in the National Park Service and benefits from the efforts of more than 2,100 volunteers a year who contribute more than 100,000 hours of service. These volunteer hours are valued at nearly two million dollars! Volunteers are involved in every aspect of park operations and are essential in fulfilling the RMNP mission. Volunteers work varied schedules; some may work a few hours on a special project, others one day each week, and many work full-time during the summer season. Below is a description of the many volunteer opportunities available in RMNP.

INTERPRETATION



Volunteers in the Division of Interpretation serve in the visitor centers and the information office. Some volunteers work with school children in environmental education, while others work behind the scenes to maintain the park’s audio-visual library. At the Holzworth Historic Site, volunteers provide historical information and guided tours. In addition, the park library, archives, and museum collection use volunteers to assist with maintaining park documents and historic items.

Volunteers also play a unique role in the park’s wildlife education programs. The Bighorn Brigade works in the spring and summer to educate the public about bighorn sheep ecology and management in RMNP. The Elk Bugle Corps works in the fall, during elk mating season, answering questions and keeping people from approaching elk. Chow Busters roam the park roads and speak with visitors about why they should not approach or feed wildlife. Interpretation volunteers protect the wildlife while enhancing visitors’ enjoyment and understanding of RMNP.

FACILITY MANAGEMENT

Visitors often comment on the excellent condition of the more than 350 miles of maintained hiking trails in RMNP. To keep these trails in great condition, volunteers are needed to do trail building, relocation, and maintenance. These volunteers perform some of the most physically challenging work in the park. The Road Hogs work one day a week on road projects, constructing buck and rail fences, and a myriad of other challenging tasks.

Volunteers are critical to the park maintenance program and assist with everything from painting buildings and picnic tables to picking up trash on the sides of the road. Volunteers may also help the Facility Management Division with special projects such as preserving the RMNP historic buildings, features, and landscapes.

SCIENCE AND RESEARCH



Volunteers with a passion for science and research enjoy serving in this Division with RMNP’s many accomplished scientists. Projects include researching the park’s plants and animals (including frogs, bighorn sheep, butterflies, elk, bear, mountain lions, and deer), studying glaciers, and working at the McGraw Ranch Research Center. Volunteers in this division have also conducted social science surveys to assess visitor impressions of park programs and resources.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Volunteers in the Division of Resource Management help manage the natural resources at RMNP. Their work ranges from assisting with the elk and sheep census, to working in the fire information office, to conducting fisheries research in connection with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In addition, volunteers staff the greenhouse and nursery. These volunteers help protect the genetic diversity of plant species in the park by collecting seeds for propagation, revegetating disturbed areas, and controlling exotic plant species.

VISITOR PROTECTION



Volunteers in the Division of Visitor Protection must be very familiar with RMNP, enjoy people, and be ready for any situation that may occur. These volunteers work in the Backcountry office preparing backcountry campers for a safe and enjoyable trip, and throughout RMNP educating and instructing visitors about resource protection and park regulations. The Sled Dawgs work at Hidden Valley in the winter months monitoring the Snow Play area and encouraging winter fun safety.

Volunteers in this Division also serve as campground hosts, acting as ambassadors for the park and living in a campground for the entire summer season. Their primary duty is to provide and interpret information about RMNP. They may also help with campground maintenance and assist rangers with explaining park rules. Campground hosts are often the first on the scene when there is an accident or a visitor needs medical attention, and may even be called on after hours when visitors need help.

VOLUNTEER GROUPS

Group projects attract large numbers of volunteers from throughout the country to participate in projects lasting anywhere from a day to several weeks. Volunteer groups at RMNP include schools, environmental organizations, churches, scout troops, and businesses. Groups work on a variety of projects including trails, campground cleanup and rehabilitation, exotic plant control, and various backcountry projects.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Volunteers should expect physically demanding working conditions at RMNP. This mountain park is characterized by high elevations (from about 8,000 to more than 14,000 feet above sea level), a dry climate, variant weather conditions, and a variety of native and exotic plant species. These conditions may cause altitude sickness and may aggravate existing medical conditions, particularly respiratory problems. The environment at RMNP is challenging—but rewarding.

HOW TO APPLY



RMNP is grateful that there are always more volunteer applicants than there are positions. The park tries to match volunteer skills and interests with park needs but there is no guarantee of placement. To request a volunteer application, please email us at ROMO_Volunteers_in_Parks@NPS.gov, or call or send a letter to:

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